

MAY 1960

The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

CATHOLICISM AND THE PRESIDENCY

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LETTERS

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Editorial Board

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AS WE SEE IT

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LETTERS

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In This Issue

PROFESSOR DE KOSTER, who among other things maintains a lively interest in politics, gives reasons why the responsible citizen raises questions about Senator Kennedy's Catholicism.

DR. BOER, principal of the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, is in a position both to observe the effects upon the African Negro of the racial policies of the Union of South Africa, and to weigh these policies in the scale of Christian morality. In an earnest plea Dr. Boer invites the Christian Reformed Church to address a relevant and appropriate word to the Reformed Churches of South Africa.

REV. JAMES HANDLEY continues in this issue his instructive series on the liturgical Year, and at the end of his article asks some pertinent questions about our celebration of the great redemptive acts of God in our behalf.

DR. CALVIN SEERVELD reflects upon the meaning of Ecclesiastes 5 and discloses its great relevance for Christian life and worship.

REV. NELSON VANDER ZEE, member of the Christian Reformed Board of Foreign Missions, presents a persuasive brief in support of the Board's decision to establish a special Gift Fund for sister church in Benue Province, Nigeria.

DR. DAANE takes note of current proposals to make of non-effect, in the interest of ecumenicity, the so-called Conclusions of Utrecht adopted in 1908 by the Christian Reformed Church. While expressing sympathy for the proposals, he raises a question which many will want answered before ending their support.

REV. JAN KAREL VAN BAALEN, retired minister and author of many books, presents with engaging candor his mature reflections on the proposed new form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

DR. CLARENCE BOERSMA indicates the nature of and the reasons for his objections to certain phrases in the Belgic Confession.

As We See It

A Significant Protest

THE COMMUNICATION which Classis Alberta South is sending to the forthcoming Synod of the Christian Reformed Church deserves Synod's most careful and sympathetic consideration.

In 1959, Synod, on the basis of a disputed reading of certain phrases, accepted a freshly proposed interpretation of the Creed. With Article V of the Belgic Confession expressly in view — "believing without any doubt all things contained therein" — Synod declared that "it is inconsonant with the Creeds to declare or suggest that there is an area of Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies."

Classis Alberta South is now protesting this action. Its protest is not lodged directly against the substance of this newly formulated Doctrine of Scripture; Classis is not affirming, against Synod, that there is in fact an area of the Bible in which historical inaccuracies could possibly occur. Its protest is also not lodged directly against Synod's novel reading of the Creed; Classis is not affirming, against Synod, that Article V of the Confession is actually more tolerant than Synod supposes. Its protest is lodged directly against Synod's inordinate haste in formulating a binding new Doctrine and against Synod's remissness in enunciating without due process a binding interpretation of the Creed. Its protest, in short, is against the *procedure* Synod followed in summarily disposing of a highly controversial issue of capital importance.

Classis observes that a very complex question, which had arisen only months before Synod convened, and which was only beginning to be debated and discussed in the Seminary and in the Church, was, without referral to Consistories and Classes and without submission to a Committee of deliberate inquiry, suddenly laid to rest by an immediate and binding pronouncement. This, Classis thinks, ought not to have occurred; Reformed churches do not settle important matters in this direct and precipitous way. These churches are bound by an Order, and this Order requires that ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted in an ecclesiastical manner, with due recognition of the status and prerogatives of the minor assemblies, and with due concern for the life and mind of the churches.

Classis, accordingly, has prepared an Appeal. It is protesting to the Synod of 1960 "the action of the Synod of 1959 in making a doctrinal decision in the interpretation of Article V of the Belgic Confession . . . without first having consulted the churches." Classis maintains that just because the Creeds are to be taken with utmost seriousness and to be recognized as having binding force, no formal and official interpretation of them should ever be attempted without prior study, consultation, and discussion. This rule is especially to be observed when the interpretation pertains to "a crucial point of doctrine," which the matter at issue admittedly is. A matter of this sort, not only in the opinion of Classis but also according to Synod's own express declaration, "should not be decided hastily."

That Synod nevertheless did decide the matter hastily and directly, without extended study and without proper referral, is most regrettable. It is so regrettable, indeed, that appropriate steps should be taken to remedy the situation. The remedial measures to be adopted need not be radical, involving, for example, direct and immediate nullification of last year's hasty action. But the force of that action should be mitigated, and there

should now take place that referral which was omitted last year but which when Synod reconvenes it will still not be too late to make. The referral should be to the churches, but also to a Committee of Inquiry. Fortunately, such a Committee is already in existence, it having been constituted by the very Synod which hazarded the doctrinal deliverance in question. Classis therefore proposes and requests "that this doctrinal deliverance be committed for study to the study committee appointed in 1959."

The reference is, of course, to the so-called Committee on Infallibility which was constituted by the Synod of 1959 upon the initiating recommendation of the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary. The Board of Trustees had noted that the entire Seminary faculty acknowledged the need of carefully defining the terms Inspiration and Infallibility since, in the opinion of the faculty, only as these terms and concepts were "rightly understood" could a necessary connection be established between the realities denoted by them. It was against this background that the Committee was constituted with the specific mandate "to study the relationship between inspiration and infallibility in the light of Scripture and and our Creedal Standards." It is to this Committee, charged as it is to inquire into the very matter about which Synod prematurely made pronouncement, that Classis Alberta South wishes the synodical pronouncement to be referred.

The proposal of Classis makes sense. Whether or not Divine inspiration precludes the possibility of "actual historical inaccuracies," and whether or not the existence of "actual historical inaccuracies" is incompatible with the idea of infallibility "rightly understood," are questions that the Committee is in any case bound to inquire into. Synod should therefore expressly authorize it to undertake the inquiry. Synod would thereby make a significant contribution to good order, and at the same time clarify an existing situation which is full of uncertainties and hesitations.

Such action would mean, of course, that Synod would not indeed retract, but nevertheless hold in abeyance, the pronouncement it too hastily took in 1959. The effect of such action is certain to be wholesome. It will encourage serious and responsible inquiry into a question that in the long run will not be silenced and repressed. It will turn loose upon an important problem the best minds and the concentrated efforts of the entire church, and restore to our communion that frankness and openness without which the possibilities of true and devout theological advance are severely limited.

It is to be hoped that Synod will heed the proposal of Classis Alberta South.

—H.S.

Gifts for TCNN?

ONE CAN FIND in the Agenda for the Synod of 1960 five overtures against, and one Appeal from, the recent decision of the Board of Foreign Missions "to establish a special gift fund, in accordance with the provisions that were made by the Synod of 1958 in response to the request of the Benue Church." The objections to the Board's decision are differently phrased, but all seem to reduce to, or at any rate focus upon, the single fact that, according to an action of the Synod of 1959, "the Christian Reformed Church [will] participate in TCNN [Theological College of Northern Nigeria] *only* to the extent of loaning Dr. H. Boer as teacher of Reformed Theology in the TCNN."

It is difficult to see, however, how this action can seriously be proposed as constituting an objection to the Board's decision. In 1958 Synod permitted "special gifts to be solicited for the native church which desires to participate in TCNN." It was expressly declared that this authorization to solicit funds "does not further commit the Christian Reformed Church to the TCNN at that time." Did Synod perhaps suggest by the last three words that such authorization would commit the Church to the TCNN at some future time? Of course not! By what sort of logic could this possibly follow? The authorization to solicit funds was in 1958, and is independent of 1960, wholly independent of the question of our participation in the TCNN. This is evident not only from considerations of simple logic, but from the express declaration of the Synod of 1958. In justifying its action to authorize the solicitation of gifts against the possible objection that it was prejudging the question of participation which was to be considered by a subsequent Synod, Synod declared: "The Christian Reformed Church has on other occasions allowed the solicitation of gifts, without thereby committing itself to actual participation in the particular cause concerned." That is plain language. But it Synod declared, quite rightly, that solicitation of gifts has nothing at all to do with participation or non-participation in TCNN.

Had the Synod of 1959 declared that the Christian Reformed Church would participate in the TCNN in no respect or degree at all, the decision, and commitment of 1958 would still stand, for the simple reason that it stands firmly on its own legs. We promised in 1958 to help the native church with gifts. That promise we are bound to keep. It is a matter of simple uncomplicated morality.

—H.S.

Catholicism and the Presidency

by Lester DeKoster

Religion is defined in many ways.

But the core of these definitions is this, that religion lies in man's relation to God, or his relation to those ideals which are higher than man himself. If this is correct, then the questions which rise in our minds about the propriety of a Roman Catholic for President of the United States are *not* primarily religious questions. No one is seriously asking about Senator Kennedy's view of his personal relations with his God. I assume that all of his fellow Christians are pleased to know that such personal relations are meaningful to him. We can be glad that a man in high public office is unashamed to declare his membership in the Body of Christ.

What is being discussed, across the country, is whether the matter of Senator Kennedy's relations with the *men*, and *institution*, whom he accepts as representative of God in the world. To rule out such discussion as bigotry, as dragging in the "religious issue," is in itself muddle headed and fanatical.

It is not without cause that he who believes that the Reformation was worth its blood, and who is assured that the Reformation set in motion forces which live still in modern political liberties, raises questions about the Senator's *Catholicism*. It would be passing strange if he did not raise such questions. Shall he blind himself to Papal claims of *infallible* authority? Shall he ignore the history of the *political* exercise of Catholic institutional power, spread before his eyes even this very hour? Shall he not read, or not believe, or pretend not to understand the Papal Encyclicals which call into question the universality of liberties which the U.S. Constitution presumed to *guarantee*?

To ask after these things, and a presidential candidate's attitudes towards them, is not bias or bigotry. It is merely responsible citizenship.

A certain candidate presents himself for your vote. You inquire after his competence, his experience, his views, his other commitments. Among these other commitments you discern one to an *institution* whose authoritarianism no one can deny. Should you, now, ask the candidate what he holds regarding "foreign" trade, but dare not ask him about his commitments to authoritarian pronouncements which (for you) issue from a "foreign" source?

Well, reader, you may withhold such questions, if you wish. And feel tolerant in so doing, too. But other citizens will ask, fairly; and studying the evidence, they will find assurance come slowly and hard.

This is a true story:

Exactly one hundred years ago there was going on in England an internal struggle over the editorship of a well-known periodical called *The Rambler*. The editor was the distinguished Catholic historian, Lord John Acton. Acton had followed into the editorship an even more famous Catholic, John Henry Newman. Newman had followed a less known Catholic editor named Simpson. The magazine was privately financed, but, as you see, Roman Catholic in orientation.

This succession of editors was not by happenstance. Simpson had been obliged by the Roman Catholic Bishops to turn over the helm to Newman because Simpson insisted on writing about political matters.

So did Editor J. H. Newman. His first issue contained an article from his pen concerning a Royal Commission then sitting on poor-law schools. With that first issue out, the Roman Bishop of Birmingham was in, demanding that the new editor resign. He did, remaining only long enough to get out one more issue; and then Lord Acton took over.

One year later, 1861, a certain Bishop Manning, destined to become Cardinal Manning, called on Acton on a matter of business.

"He was anxious," wrote Acton to his predecessor Newman, "I should disengage myself from *The Rambler* . . .," a move which, unlike the others, Lord Acton stubbornly refused to make.

Manning was firm. If Acton did not resign, Rome would take a hand. Rome did. In due season, a rescript arrived censuring the Editor, and Acton writes again to Newman, "The violence of feeling in the Curia seems to have reached a height. You would be greatly shocked to hear of the mode in which — I greatly fear with the concurrence of Manning — they have lately attempted to do me a private injury, for the purpose of serving their public ends."

However shocked Newman might have been, and he almost grew inured to shocks from his adopted brethren, one wonders what he thought as he read, only fourteen years later, this same Manning's bland assurance to the British people, "If Catholics were in power tomorrow in England, not a penal law would be proposed, not the shadow of a constraint put upon the faith of any man They would have the same liberties we enjoy as a minority."

Could it be that Manning did not think of Lord Acton as, first of all, an Englishman to whom equal tolerance was due?

This story is told in the Introduction to Lord Acton's *Essays on Church and State*. Manning's famous assurance first appeared in 1875, the year he became a Cardinal, and has been oft quoted since. You will find it (though not the tale of *The Rambler*) in Professor Maritain's *Church and State*.

As you reflect on the story, you will probably remember that it was Acton who coined the famous aphorism to the effect that power always corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Could this truth be the reason why, with far greater wisdom than animates the self-styled successors to Saint Peter, the Fathers of this free nation sharply divided the powers of the State, and did so (for that matter) in the spirit of the Reformation?

One story does not make a history, or even a good case. The Bishops' treatment of *The Rambler* is but echoed in the Protestants' treatment of F. D. Maurice, or, in fact, their treatment of Newman himself. It is, incidentally, worth an essay in these pages sometime, in these days when especially in Europe the "going over" of Newman into the Roman Church is so widely re-studied and proclaimed, to remind ourselves that Newman was as much *driven* as led into Catholicism. Had his Protestant brethren sought as hard, or even half as hard, to keep him as they strove to isolate him, who knows what the ecclesiastical history of the last century might have been. Those who feared, or suspected, or envied his genius, paid a high price to get him out of their way.

But, to return to the theme: one story does not make a case. And, be it confessed, some Protestant leaders would no doubt as lief exercise authoritarian powers in their own communion as do the Roman Bishops in theirs. Moreover, the record of *Catholicism* for courageous social reform is long and glorious. And this same Manning is said to have been of prime influence in the great Papal Encyclical on the Condition of Labor (*Rerum Novarum*).

The only point here is that the question of *Catholicism* is not first of all a *religious* issue, and is intensely practical. To define, to face, and to defeat when we can the force of *human* authoritarianism in whatever configuration it appears is but loyalty to the memory and sacrifice of those who faced such power in harder times and ways than those we now know — thanks to them. Where Senator Kennedy stands, or could be *obliged* by his church in the light of his confession to stand, in this context is a problem which every citizen will ultimately have to solve for himself in the polling booth.

The citizen's assurance will come, I suggested above, slowly and hard. Not so much because he remembers *The Rambler*, even if he knew of it. But because he cannot quite rid himself of the feeling that the "Newman of the twentieth century,"

Father Ronald Knox, speaks too nearly the mind of the Catholic Church universal when he says, "You cannot bind over the Catholic Church, as the price of your adhesion to her doctrines, to waive all right of invoking the secular arm in defence of her own principles You have to assume, for practical purposes, a country with a very strong Catholic majority, the over-whelming body of the nation Given such circumstances, is it certain that the Catholic Government of the nation would have no right to insist on the Catholic religion being taught in all schools open to the general public, and even to deport or imprison those who unsettled the minds of its subjects with new doctrines?"

I take it that to this question, he who stands on the American Declaration and Constitution gives only one, unqualified answer: Absolutely, *it is certain* that the Catholic Government would have *no such right!*

But this is not Father Knox's answer; he replies "It is certain that the Church would claim that right for the Catholic Government, even if considerations of prudence forbade its exercise in fact In a word, the unity of the Church has hard edges" (*The Belief of Catholics*, pp. 203-04).

Edges too "hard", perhaps, for democracy?

Back Issues Wanted

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Reformed Does Not Mean Apartheid

by Harry R. Boer

WHEN IN JANUARY, 1958, I attended the meeting of the International Missionary Council in Accra, I sensed for the first time, in conversations with African representatives, an ominous fact that has in the past year proven all too true: in their sponsorship of Apartheid, the whites in South Africa have to reckon with the open hostility not only of their black compatriots but with the direct opposition of all of Africa south of the Sahara. This opposition is to be distinguished from the criticism and opposition of the rest of the world — it is and will be more intense, more threatening, and is based not only on a conception of human rights, but on racial identification with oppressed brethren on a continental scale.

This fact has been brought home sharply during the past few weeks as a result of the recent tragic developments in the Union of South Africa. The mass shooting of black Africans at Sharpeville, the subsequent successful sympathy strike, and the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Verwoerd have led to actions on the part of African states of which I instance here only the action taken in Nigeria. The condemnation of Apartheid expressed by the Federal Government and the beginning of actions undertaken by it was followed by similar action in the House of Assembly in the Northern region in which the Sudan United Mission is active. The Northern House forbade the further engagement of white South Africans in the civil service, cancelled appointments made, and discharged those who had been recently engaged. This is probably only the beginning of actions which will become more severe once full independence has been attained (October, 1960).

A boycott of goods has already been widely mentioned. More significant perhaps were sentiments expressed by the seconder of the motion which proposed the above-mentioned sanctions. He stated that he would be the first volunteer to join any group of Africans that might be organized to fight against South African whites. The speaker may have engaged in theatrics, and at this stage of the opposition such talk may be cheap. But the fact of the suggestion and the loud applause that followed indicate as a matter not to be lightly dismissed the possibility of an eventual black-white war over South African racial policies.

Can the catastrophe of civil war in South Africa and possibly war on a larger scale still be avoided? Ian Paton, the well-known South African author of *Cry, The Beloved Country*, wrote in a recent issue of the *New York Times*,

What does the Nationalist [white supporter of Apartheid] think of the future? He looks at it with foreboding, but then, he always did. Yet the foreboding has never been so great as now, because the future, so to speak, has never been so near. It has been standing out there for three centuries, but now it is knocking at the door.

The Nationalist comforts himself that the Afrikaner has always had to struggle, that the new crisis is nothing new. But in his heart he knows that this crisis is the last crisis of all . . . Events like the recent tragedies help to open his eyes, but what he needs to bring him out of the pipedream is a decisive order from the outside world.

It must be an order to bring to an end the second greatest Christian apostasy of the twentieth century, or to take the consequences.

Many of us pray that such an order will soon be heard.

THE ORDER, I am convinced, cannot be given by "the outside world." The African Nationalist is blinded. Elsewhere in his article Paton compares him to the blinded Samson who brought destruction to his enemies and himself together. His concern for his way of life in the present seems to cancel out the possibility of concern for an inevitably tragic future. No pleas, no warnings, have induced such concern in the past. It is not likely that any moral "orders" will induce it in the future.

There must indeed be an order. But it must come from *outside the world*. It must come from God who created all men in his image, and from the Christ who died and rose for all men regardless of their color, creed, or culture. It is God in Christ who must speak, and only his decisive speaking can halt the march to the abyss.

How does God speak? He speaks in many ways and various. But one way in which he enlists men to speak with him and for him is to speak through the Church. We, the body of Christ, are his chosen instrument to declare not only his salvation to the nations, but also his righteousness, his holiness, his justice.

The non-Dutch churches of European background in South Africa have expressed their deep concern over the developing situation. How widely official pronouncements of these bodies reflect the average layman's point of view is anyone's guess. Fact is that the whites of both British and Dutch extraction stand behind the government or, if not wholly that, behind some sort of a program that will ensure the retention of white superiority. The opposition United Party may *speak* more moderately than the

Government; whether it will *be* more moderate in a showdown remains to be seen.

As it is the universal embarrassment of whites to be of the same skin color as the proponents of Apartheid, so it is the universal embarrassment of Reformed people and churches to be of the same ecclesiastical and religious family as the South African Dutch. Should we, the Christian Reformed Church in America, not speak to the Reformed churches in South Africa? We are of Dutch extraction; we are Reformed; like them we are a Reformed planting on another continent; in Northern Nigeria the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa honors us by entrusting us with the continuation of mission work which for more than thirty-five years they have carried on with self-sacrifice and devotion. Have we not a special responsibility here? Are we not in particular charged with laying upon the Reformed churches in South Africa the prior claims of God's love and justice? Can we not do so in the humility of the realization that we ourselves are not without guilt in the scandal of American segregational practices?

Should not healing for the South African nation arise first from the Church in its midst? Is not the Christ in her midst the power of God unto salvation? Must not the Church speak to the conscience of the nation? Should she not, in fact, be what Archbishop Temple once called the Church everywhere, namely, "the conscience of the nation"?

BUT HOW CAN the Reformed churches in South Africa be the prophetic voice of God to the nation when they are bound by the same prudential concerns that govern her worldly national community and government? The Reformed churches in South Africa cannot speak the healing word until they rise above the prudence of their own fears and live in the wisdom of God which is foolishness to men. Is it not at this point that the Christian Reformed Church should speak to her fellow Reformed churches in South Africa? Could not a strong voice speaking in love *within* the family possibly be more effective than the pleadings, warnings, and criticisms of churches outside the theological and ecclesiastical family?

It may be said that we really do not know the South African race problem, and that the better one gets to know it the more he is inclined to speak with restraint. This is doubtless true. But what is

even more true is that no race may permanently lord it over another race, that a policeman's grip is a poor substitute for freedom under law, and that disenfranchisement and second-class citizenship for two-thirds to three-fourths of a nation's population cannot possibly be squared with Christian convictions.

As for the Christian Reformed Church's concern with the South African situation, I am aware of the Race Resolutions adopted by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of which we are part. These resolutions, however, do not concern themselves specifically with the South African problem. Moreover, having been accepted by the South African delegates they are presumably in some way considered to be not wholly incompatible with Apartheid policies. And finally, we have adopted these Resolutions as a witness to the Race problem in the world. At this point, however, has South Africa been directly referred to or addressed in them, even though, I remember correctly, it was the South African situation that originally occasioned the discussion in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. A specific pleading, but pointed communication to the Reformed churches in South Africa would be a duplication of anything done by us in the past and would hopefully, under God's blessing, prick the conscience of our Reformed brethren in a manner that can not be achieved by a general declaration of principles.

IS CHRISTIANITY, as the Moslems maintain, the white man's religion? And is the Reformed segment of it a particularly hateful expression of the white man's superiority complex on the religious front? Does Calvinism call for Apartheid? These are questions that the intelligent African is or will soon be pondering. If we are concerned to gain standing and acceptance for the Reformed faith in Africa, then now is the time to disown, clearly and unambiguously, any sympathy with the attitude that our Reformed brethren in South Africa take to Apartheid and all its attendant evils. Such action might not greatly affect life in the United States, but it would show that we are our sister's keeper; it might awaken some in the Reformed churches in South Africa to the lateness of the hour of the day in which there is time to act; and it would help the Reformed mission in Nigeria to say and show that Reformed does not mean Apartheid.

The Great Fifty Days

by James O. Handley, Jr.

ou have a festive day every eighth day. Call out the individual solemnities of the nations and set them out in row; they will not be able to make up a Pentecost (a ce of fifty days, editor)" (Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, XIV). e, however (just as we have received), only on the day the Lord's Resurrection ought to guard not only against eeling, but every posture and office of solicitude ilarily, too, in the period of Pentecost; which period we inguish by the same solemnity of exultation" (Tertullian, *Prayer*, XXIII).

a man is able to say truthfully, 'We are risen with rist' he is always living in the days of Pentecost, ticularly when, like the apostles of Jesus, he goes up to upper room and gives time to supplication and prayer, that he becomes worthy of the mighty, rushing wind m heaven . . ." (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Bk. VIII, XXII.)

et us then add, one after the other, the seven holy weeks Pentecost, rejoicing and praising God, that He hath these things made known to us beforehand, joy and t everlasting prepared in heaven for us and for those o truly believe in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Athanasius, *tal Letters*, No. 19, Sect. 10).

Judging from the above statements of early Chris- n theologians and apologists, one must conclude t the ante-Nicene churches celebrated the re- mptive acts of our Saviour quite differently than . In contrast to our days for Easter, Ascension, d Pentecost, they observed a fifty-day period. It gan with what we call Easter (Pascha to them) d ran for forty-nine days until a climax on Pente- st Sunday. As the reader can see from the quo- ions, this period was often designated as the ays" or "period" or "weeks" of Pentecost, or mply as "Pentecost." This is rather confusing to ecause we are accustomed to thinking of Pente- st as a solitary day. (The Anglicans have further mplicated matters by naming the days from Eas- e to Ascension as "Eastertide.") Moreover, it quite natural for us to assume that any *season* Pentecost would come after the Day of Pente- st rather than *before*. There is, however, no staking that the weeks or days of Pentecost in e early church began with Easter. As part of s description of the death of the Emperor Con- antine, A.D. 337, Eusebius wrote:

All these events occurred during a most important festi- val; I mean the august and holy solemnity of Pente- cost, which is distinguished by a period of seven weeks and sealed with that one day on which the Holy Scrip- tures attest the ascension of our common Saviour into heaven and the Descent of the Holy Spirit among men (*Life of Constantine*, Bk. IV, Ch. LXIV).

To avoid any more confusion it is best to call the seven weeks The Great Fifty Days or the Paschal Season. But also in contrast to us the primitive churches did not observe three separate festivals: one for the Resurrection, another for the Ascension, and, finally, one for Pentecost. Rather, they ob- served one festival involving all three events. As Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, and Eusebius testify, there was one continuous celebration of our Lord's mighty acts of salvation. The key-note did not consist in a remembrance of the time and fact of those acts but in a repeated "experiencing" of Christ as the Risen-Ascended Man, the Reigning Lord, and the Giver of the Spirit. "There was no rigid distinction of themes within the whole period of fifty days of joy and victory which extended from the Day of the Pascha to the Day of Pentecost" (A. A. MacArthur, *Evolution of the Christian Year*, p. 155).

SO FAR, WE HAVE CONSIDERED only the structural differences between our celebration of the Resur- rection, Ascension, and Pentecost and the church's original fifty-day celebration. There exists another difference much more profound. In fact, it deter- mines the structural one. I refer to the predominant eschatological emphasis in the primitive Paschal Season. There was a fore-tasting of the powers and victory and joy of the new heavens and new earth, the glory of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the singing of praises to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Through the entire period the Christians used the praise-shout, "Hallelujah," in their corporate worship, as though they were al- ready standing in the courts of the New Jerusalem. By means of the Great Fifty Days, the early churches liturgically reflected and experienced in part the reality to which the Apostle testified: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first- fruits of those who have fallen asleep (I Cor. 15:20). . . . But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6).

Such an interpretation of the church's corporate worship is supported when one examines some of the third- and fourth-century writers. Athanasius, in referring to Easter day as the "holy first day of the week," said: "The holy first day of the week having risen upon us we celebrate too the days

of holy Pentecost following thereon, shewing forth through them the world to come" (*Festal Letters*, No. 4, Sect. 5). Basil, speaking about the Holy Spirit, about 374 A.D., declared: "All Pentecost is a reminder of the resurrection expected in the age to come" (*On the Holy Spirit*, Ch. XXVII, Sect. 66). In a letter, Augustine wrote: "... which period of fifty days we celebrate after the Lord's resurrection, as representing not toil, but rest and gladness. For this reason we do not fast in them; and in praying we stand upright, which is an emblem of resurrection" (*Letter 55, To Januarius*, Ch. XV, Sect. 28).

So, it might be said that at the Pascha the early Christians "blasted off" into a fifty-day flight in the aeon to come. But there was a re-entering time and reality at Pentecost. Then the primitive Christians made their final "outburst" of celebrating the resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Spirit. "There was a real appropriateness in thus returning, as it were, into time from the long celebration of the eternal Kingdom of God and the heavenly reign of Christ during Paschaltide, with a final celebration of the gift of the Spirit by Whom the presence of the heavenly Christ is perpetually mediated to His members in time. As the Pascha dramatized the fact of eternal redemption, so Pentecost dramatised the fact of the Christian possession of (or by) the Spirit, which made that redemption an effective reality in his life in time" (Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 341).

IN CONTRAST to that original and Biblical emphasis on eschatology, our celebrations of Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost stress history and doctrine. We view the mighty acts of God in Christ as a series of events in history; each is given its proper order or sequence: Easter, then Ascension, then Pentecost; one, two, three. Indeed, they are historical; they really happened; but they are also more than historical. Concerned with immediate historicity we have unfortunately closed ourselves to the eschatological insight and practice of the ante-Nicene church. Then, too, we have accentuated doctrine in observing the festivals. We use these special Days as times in which we preach the doctrine of the Resurrection, the doctrine of the Ascension, the doctrine of Pentecost. There was an abundance of teaching about the redemptive acts of Christ in the early church, particularly during the Lenten preparation of catechumens for initiation into the Body of Christ through the Pascha. But the Great Fifty Days consisted of much more than teaching and preaching. It was *participation* in the *reality* of Christ's triumph. The preaching during the Paschal Season can be called only one means and witness to the church's experience with the Risen, Glorified, Spirit-Sending Lord. For that reason,

the Great Fifty Days are not described as only historical commemoration or the increasing of doctrinal knowledge, but also as "exaltation," "gladness," and "joy."

ALL THE FOREGOING may seem so strange to us that our suspicions are awakened: Could not the Paschal Season be interpreted as only another sign of the early, gradual deflection of the church from the Apostolic tradition or New Testament revelation? Was it not an incipient Roman Catholicizing of the church? Or, can we not explain (and so dismiss) the Great Fifty Days as evidence that the church of the third and fourth centuries did not understand the Apostolic revelation in the New Testament? I think such suspicions are quite unfounded for two reasons.

First, liturgiologists and New Testament scholars have demonstrated that the Christian forms, sacraments, days and festivals of worship developed from the Jewish cultus. We must never forget that both Jesus and the apostles, as well as the earliest Christians, were born and reared as members of Israel. They were trained not only in the doctrines of the Old Testament, but also in its liturgy. That liturgy involved certain words, prayers, acts, and Psalms used privately in homes, weekly in Sabbath worship, and periodically in certain festivals of the annual calendar. Any careful reading of the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles will disclose that our Lord Himself, the Apostles, and the mother church in Jerusalem observed that liturgy. It was quite natural, even necessary, as part of its witness to being the new Israel of God, that the Apostolic church took over and transformed the Jewish worship. So, we read of a Christian Passover or Pascha and a Christian Pentecost. Between the Jewish Passover and Pentecost was a period of seven weeks or forty-nine Omer days (Leviticus 23:15-21). It was a festival season. The early church took over and transformed it into the Great Fifty Days. "Just as for the Jews the fifty days of harvest between Passover and Pentecost symbolized the joyful fact of their possession of the Promised Land, so these fifty days symbolised for the Christian the fact that 'in Christ' he had already entered into the Kingdom of God" (Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 340).

We must learn to view the church's worship not as a break with the Old Testament cultus, but as a transformation and transfiguration of it. But it came as a result of a process and so was not immediately evident, as we see in the instance of the Jerusalem Christians who still participated in all the ceremony of the Temple. But through the crisis caused by the admission of uncircumcised Gentiles into the churches, and deeper theological collisions,

the rupture with Judaism was complete by the end of the second century. The point of all this, however, is that we can be reasonably sure that the Great Fifty Days probably took form in the late Apostolic period or soon thereafter; it could hardly be a deflection from or misunderstanding of the worship of the New Testament churches, any more than the Pascha and Day of Pentecost.

The other argument in defense of the Great Fifty Days is along the lines of textual criticism. Commenting on Acts 2:1—"When the day of Pentecost was fully come"—Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., builds up a very persuasive case that the text refers to the Paschal Period. He does so by means of the Greek construction, the reading from Codex Bezae, and the Latin and Syriac Peshitto version of the text. His conclusion is worth quotation:

Irrespective therefore of what the Evangelist himself might have known or intended to express about such a festival, the textual evidence shows us that such a celebration existed in the Church in the post-apostolic age at the latest and before the crisis created by the rise of Gnosticism. The Paschal-Pentecost feast of fifty days might therefore claim with some justification, as Tertullian and Hippolytus in the early third century did claim for it, a basis in apostolic tradition (*The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse*, p. 26).

In my judgment, the weight of evidence is against the possibility that the Great Fifty Days is a relic we can ignore. Rather, it sets before us a humiliating possibility; namely, that not the ante-Nicene fathers, but until recently we ourselves have misunderstood and misinterpreted the life and worship of the New Testament church! After all, we are very much sons of the Reformation, and the Reformers got only part way in their efforts to return to the worship of the primitive church, owing to many factors, one of which was lack of information. But through the so-called Liturgical Movement, new Biblical and patristic studies, and the younger churches, the Spirit of Christ continues to reform and teach the church in the ways of worship. Part of His work has been the rediscovery of the Great Fifty Days.

I do not mean, however, to leave the impression that I believe the reform and growth of the church in the will of Christ can be accomplished simply by return to some normative period, as the ante-Nicene or Reformation period and imitation of its worship. Rather, in submission to the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture we must critically re-study and re-evaluate the worship (and doctrine as well) of those periods. We must seek in His light and power to determine the meanings and relevance of the past forms for the church's contemporary situation, life, and witness. May I list some of the questions we need to ask about the Great Fifty Days?

(1) While it is very probable that this festival was developed in the primitive Church, is it an integral part of Christian worship?

(2) If not, then can we still afford to ignore it?

(3) In the latter part of the fourth century, the eschatological emphasis of the Paschal Period was replaced by an emphasis on historical commemoration of the Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost. Finally, the unity of the Period suffered destruction by the sequential observation of the Day of Easter, the Day of Ascension, and the Day of Pentecost, three separate festivals. Can we restore the primitive, Biblical stress on eschatology in celebrating the Victory of Christ without also restoring the original structure—The Great Fifty Days?

(4) By the most effective advertising of Easter clothes, hats, candies, foods, even cleaner's bags, the business world builds people up to Easter, as for Christmas. We Christians are more influenced than we think by it all. Then after Easter comes the big commercial drive for Mother's Day. How could we sustain a festival season of fifty days when all the world around us has forgotten the Victory of Christ by the first Monday after Easter and plunged into plans for pagan May festivals?

(5) If we could sustain a Paschal Period, could we do it in such a way that it would be a relevant witness in our society?

(6) What liturgical forms could we use to restore the Great Fifty Days? After all, teaching and preaching would not be sufficient, for the Paschal Period is more than remembrance and doctrine; it is an intensely renewed communion with the Lord Jesus Christ as risen, ascended, reigning, and sending the Spirit.

PENTECOST

"When the day of Pentecost had come, . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . ."

"This is the Spirit that at the beginning 'moved upon the face of the waters;' by whom the world moves; by whom creation consists, and all things have life; who also wrought mightily in the prophets, and descended in flight upon Christ. This is the Spirit that was given to the apostles in the form of fiery tongues. This is the Spirit that David sought when he said, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.' Of this Spirit Gabriel also spoke to the Virgin, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.' By this Spirit Peter spake that blessed word, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' By this Spirit the rock of the Church was established. This is the Spirit, the Comforter, that is sent because of Jesus, that He may show Him to be the Son of God."

—HIPPLYTUS (A.D. 170-236)

Let Your Words Be Few

by Calvin Seerveld

THE INSPIRED PHILOSOPHER of Ecclesiastes was out investigating what's new under the sun. And the result of his careful investigation so far was: not much. In fact, there is nothing new under the sun. It all comes back to vanity; that is, Nothing.

Intensive study of everything he laid eyes on in a desperate attempt to find something permanent only gave him a headache and an intensified sensitivity to suffering. When he decided, all right, I'll eat, drink and be merry, find happiness in an accumulation of women, beautiful gardens, precious stones, musicians, oriental splendour, he discovered that riches were bitter-sweet: tomorrow he might die, and you can't take it with you.

Furthermore, he saw ruthless oppression done everywhere under the sun and jealous cut-throat competition between neighbors, fellow men; and this lonely philosopher-king remarked plaintively:

Everybody tries to go it alone; they will always be sorry individuals, sorrowful.

Two are better than one. Working together is better than working alone. If a fellow fall down, the other will help him up; but if you are alone when you fall, too bad, there is no one to help you up.

Or, if two lie together, then there is a little heat, but how can one be warm alone?

But even with two—all of life is vanity, empty, meaningless.

THEN, IN HIS CAREFUL INVESTIGATION of reality, the inspired philosopher of Ecclesiastes looked around and spied believers, worshippers of God; he saw people worshipping God in the temple. Surely here, finally, there would be an end to vanity!

He moved in for a close look. After examination he said what is found in Ecclesiastes 5, which is meant for those he saw worshipping and for anyone who is willing to listen:

When you worship God,
Do not be in a hurry to open your mouth;
Do not be in a hurry, you, to talk out in the presence
of God;
For God is in Heaven,
And you are on earth,
Therefore, let your words be few.

Just as dreamy thoughts come from too many pre-
occupations,
So foolish talk comes from too many words.

And whenever you do speak out and promise God
something,

Do not put off keeping your promise, for God does not
like those who try to fool Him with Words.

Whatever you promise, you had better keep.

It is better not to promise than not to keep what
you promised.

Do not let your mouth lead you lightly on into this sin,
and then try to tell the (investigating) angel "I
didn't mean it."

Do you wonder why God gets angry at even the sound
of your voice?

Do you wonder why He breaks down what you try to
build up yourself?

Know this:

there is vanity in an overflow of pious words too
just as there is in a raft of vague ideals.

Do not talk so much.

Do not make so many dreamy promises.

Fear God.

What is Scripture saying? It is saying this:

God Almighty is in Heaven; little grasshopper that you are, do you mean to talk so long and so loud that the Lord of Heaven and Earth will be impressed? You would be a fool to do so. Fools talk too much.

And if you use high-sounding words, beautiful words—thank you, Lord, that I am not like these other people; or passionate promisory words—help me, Lord, it won't happen again; those words are like daydreams of a scatterbrain: rash vows—that is what they are, trying to use God for a good thing; or just show, show-off, pretending to be a true worshipper taking up the name of Jesus. This is what fools do. You would be a fool to try to make a fool out of God.

Foolishness is sin. Don't think you may excuse yourself to the angel—"it was just a slip of the lips"—when called to account for what you said. Hear the command of the Lord: choose your words carefully when you address God Almighty; make every word count; and when you have said something in the presence of Jehovah, it is a vow; pay up or shut up (says Scripture).

The message of Ecclesiastes 5 is a warning against hypocrisy. Who of us would dare to throw the first stone? We are all vulnerable on the count of vanity.

If there be too much of you in your worship of God, says Ecclesiastes, more your talk than attentive scrutiny of His revelation, and if there be undue easiness or protracted exposition on your part in

the presence of God, then it is sinful worship, vanity — and the Old Testament uses a concrete word — it is hot air.

The double-edged warning is this for all who have ears to hear: God Almighty has all the time in the world to hear the stuttering of His children who fear Him and who do not know precisely how to phrase their petitions; but God has no time at all for people who like to hear themselves talk or who give lip service in coverup for their own ambitions and self-glory. These last take the name of the Lord in vain — it will not get them anything; these last are fools, and God does not listen to fools. He laughs at them, a terrible inhuman laughter which will eventually break a man and his work into pieces.

Father in Heaven,

We confess our sin. We confess that our prayers are often just so much noise and that our worship is a dumbshow.

Convict us of the seriousness of the situation.

Give us searching hearts; we need help because we like to hear ourselves talk, it sounds so fine in our own ears.

Forgive us, Lord, for all the small talk and empty talk and chatter in our daily worship, the impression, excess, irrelevance, flattery, vanity.

Teach us to be meaning what we say, teach us to pray, our Father who art in Heaven, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

On Keeping One's Word

by Nelson Vander Zee

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED Board of Foreign Missions at its February session acted favorably on a request of Nigerian General Conference to endorse solicitation of gifts for the Theological College of Northern Nigeria. The Board's decision follows:

It was decided to heed the request of General Conference "to establish a special gift fund in accordance with the provisions that were made by the Synod of 1958 in response to the request of the Benue Church and which other missions and churches are looking to us to fulfill."

Grounds:

1. It is essential to the maintaining of good relations on the field and of retaining the good will and confidence of the national Christians.
2. We have a moral obligation over against our sister church to help her in her need.

This decision will be reported to the forthcoming Synod in accord with established procedure. It will be opposed by three Classes (Sioux Center, Orange City, and British Columbia), one Consistory (Seattle), and nine members of the Board of Foreign Missions, who by way of overtures and appeals to Synod are protesting against the action of the Board. This article is an attempt to develop in greater detail the reasons that led the Board to make its decision.

AS THE BOARD MINUTE indicates, this special gift fund will be established in accordance with the decision of the Synod of 1958. That decision follows:

Synod permit special gifts to be solicited for the native church which desires to participate in TCNN, and that it be understood that this does not further commit the Christian Reformed Church to the TCNN at this time inasmuch as the support is given to the native Church and the responsibility for expansion of TCNN at this time is the responsibility of the native Church.

Grounds:

- a. The Benue church has requested such help.
- b. The Christian Reformed Church has on other occasions allowed the solicitation of gifts, without thereby committing itself to actual participation in the particular cause concerned (*Acts*, 1958, p. 60).

The contention of those members of the Mission Board who opposed the Board's action is that this decision of 1958 was nullified by the decision of the Synod of 1959, namely, that we "participate in TCNN only to the extent of loaning Dr. H. Boer as teacher of Reformed Theology in the TCNN" (*Acts*, p. 46). They maintain that the proposed solicitation of gifts will extend our participation beyond the loaning of Dr. Boer. In other words, they say that the Synod of 1959 has in effect forbidden such solicitation.

This contention is obviously in contradiction to the expressed conviction of the Synod of 1958. That Synod, having decided to "continue Dr. Harry Boer as a teacher in TCNN," declared that solicitation of funds "does not further commit the Christian Reformed Church to TCNN at this time . . ." (see *Acts*, pp. 59, 60). And the second ground given declares that there is precedent for such assertion.

If it was understood that solicitation of gifts did not commit us beyond the loaning of Dr. Boer in 1958, it is reasonable to conclude that it does not further commit us any other time. If this solicitation did not further commit the church beyond the loaning of Dr. Boer in 1958, this solicitation cannot consistently be construed as doing so in 1959, nor in 1960.

Moreover, although the protestants of the Board's action in February maintain that the Synod of 1959, in approving of participation "only to the extent of loaning Dr. Boer," thereby expressed disapproval of, and forbade solicitation of gifts, this prohibition was in fact neither the understanding nor the intent of Synod 1959. That this was *not* the mind of Synod 1959 can be readily ascertained by reference to the *Acts* of Synod of that year. On page 10 the following significant declaration is found:

Esteemed Brethren:

The delegates of Classis British Columbia herewith give notice of their dissatisfaction of the fact that Synod has not dealt with the substance of protest No. 1.

What was this protest No. 1, (found in *Agenda*, 1959, p. 375), the substance of which *had not been dealt with* by Synod? It was a protest registered "against the decision of the last Synod to solicit funds through its Mission Board for the Theological College of Northern Nigeria." And precisely with this matter, said the delegates from Classis British Columbia, Synod 1959 did *not* deal. We find, therefore, that in the conviction of those most desirous of Synod's prohibition of solicitation of gifts, such prohibition was neither stated nor implied by Synod's action in 1959.

THERE IS NOTHING in the Board's decision, nor in the protests, that will necessitate Synod's reconsideration of the whole matter of participation in TCNN. Synod will simply be faced with the necessity of deciding whether or not the Board's action is in accordance with an extant synodical directive. It need but determine whether or not the promise of help made in 1958 still stands. This will settle the matter. Surely we shall not have to consider whether or not a promise shall be kept.

It is not part of the burden of this article to bring forth again the many considerations that have been advanced in this journal and elsewhere advocating support of TCNN. Such has already been done with a proficiency that is more than adequate. All of the considerations bearing on the urgent need for united theological education in Northern Nigeria may be found lucidly, forcefully, and concisely set forth in the *Acts* of Synod, 1957 (Supplement No. 16, pp. 270-272). It merely remains for us now to consider what would be the dire results of an about-face on

this two-year-old promise of financial help made to our sister church.

As the request of Nigerian General Conference indicates, it is the conviction of Conference and, we may be sure, of our sister Church that this help in meeting the initial building costs of TCNN has been *promised*. Should we fail to keep this promise we shall first of all break our word. This is wrong, a wrong that would cause our missionaries great embarrassment before the Nigerian Christians — not to mention the discrediting of our sister Church itself in the larger Fellowship associated with the Sudan United Mission. We should thereby place in jeopardy all of the good relations that now obtain between our missionaries and our sister Church, and significantly diminish the future influence of our missionaries and the effectiveness of their labors.

Eloquent testimony to the reality of this danger and to our mission staff's sensitivity to it — as well as to their profound conviction that TCNN must become a full-fledged reality in these crucial days of emerging Nigerian nationhood — is the fact that the missionaries themselves have voluntarily contributed \$1800 of their *personal funds* in an endeavor to fulfill the *promise made by our denomination* in 1958!

It should be observed, too, that from the beginning of our discussions about TCNN it was understood by all that our sister Church would be sending its more advanced students to it for training. In fact, a great part of synodical discussion and investigation dealt with this great concern: How shall we safeguard and augment the Reformed convictions of our young men who shall admittedly be attending there? We are at present already beginning to obtain benefits of theological leadership for our sister church at TCNN. The Benue Church already has three young men there. Many more will follow. Considerable time will elapse before any other means can be instituted to meet the crying need for theological leadership. How shall we appear in the eyes of our Nigerian brethren, and in our own eyes, if we refuse to bear this minimal portion of the cost of the benefits that shall be accruing to us from this sole institution providing theological education in Northern Nigeria? And surely any contributions given in response for benefits received and in expectation of years of benefits to come can hardly brand us as more co-responsible than we already are for the institution from which such benefits flow.

God grant us as a Church met in session at the forthcoming Synod the wisdom and the will to act in firm fidelity to our sister Church, to our missionaries, to our solemn word, and to our God.

Utrecht and Unity

by James Daane

SYNOD OF 1960 is confronted with two unusual overtures, one from Classis Hamilton, the other from Classis Eastern Ontario. Both Canadian overtures request Synod to set aside the Conclusions of Utrecht, which the Christian Reformed Churches adopted in 1908. The reason prompting this request is not that these Conclusions are doctrinally untrue. The request that they be no longer regarded as the official position of our churches is prompted rather by the consideration that they have become an obstacle to ecumenical discussion and possible ecclesiastical union with other Reformed brethren.

These overtures urge that the Conclusions of Utrecht served a good purpose in their day by preserving the peace and the unity of the Church, but that today the need for them no longer exists. If they once served the functions of keeping the peace and unity of the Church, today they are a hindrance to the unity and peace of Reformed people. So runs the argument.

We ought I think give sympathetic hearing to any serious attempt to overcome the divisions between Reformed people. Every effort ought to be exerted to heal the painful divisions and subdivisions which have broken the unity of the Reformed Church, particularly where such divisions have occurred because of highly moot and finely spun theological differences. No theological refinements of doctrine contained within the original confessional basis of unity ought ever to become a ground for separation. If the doctrinal contents of the original basis of unity warranted the original "coming-together," they also justify the necessity of remaining together.

If the Conclusions of Utrecht were a strictly confessional document, a request to set them aside and to deprive them of their binding official character in order to promote ecumenicity, would not warrant serious consideration. The Conclusions, however, are a functional rather than a confessional instrument. Their intent was not to set down what is true about the matters at issue. Their intent was rather to declare that finely refined differing theological positions of a highly academic character can and may exist within the same church, and ought not to lead to ecclesiastical separation. The Conclusions performed the function of keeping the unity and peace of the Church from being broken by differences of theological position which could only arise within the minds of academic theologians. Theological differences of this kind — regardless of

their truth or error — do not warrant a breaking of the unity of the Church of Christ.

The Conclusions of Utrecht deal with precisely this kind of divergent theological positions. The Reformed Creeds are infralapsarian. Does this mean that supralapsarianism is therefore condemned as heresy, and that the supralapsarian is un-Reformed and ought to be put out of the Reformed Church? The Conclusions say: No, both may and should abide within the church. Is the Christian justified in eternity or in time? Is the ground for the baptism of infants the covenant promise or the assumed regeneration of the infant? Is a sinner regenerated, directly, that is, without the divine employment of any means, or is he regenerated without means and yet in conjunction with the Word and Sacraments, yet in such conjunction with the Word that God is able to regenerate, if he will—for example, in benighted paganism—apart from the Word? This may perchance send the reader reeling, but it illustrates the highly technical character of the disputed matters dealt with by the Conclusions. If the Conclusions of Utrecht kept the Church from rending its unity over such matters, they served a highly worthy function. And further, if such differences as exist in our churches today on these matters do not threaten the peace and the unity of the church — and they do not — then it is true that the Conclusions have served their function in the past, and serve no function today. The occasional Reformed theologian in the Reformed community of today who is pressing the ultimate implications of supralapsarianism is conducting a crusade with no future. The over-all spirit and mentality of the Christian Reformed churches is such that their peace and unity, in my judgment, will never again be threatened by the issues that seriously troubled the Reformed Church at the turn of the century.

THERE IS, however, one blind spot, not in the minds of the authors, but in the overtures themselves. Since they themselves are on location, the Canadians know how and in what manner the Conclusions of Utrecht are, in their concrete situation, a hindrance and obstacle to larger Reformed ecumenicity. South of their border, however, the American sector of the Christian Reformed churches is bound to ask the question: Why does the "compromising" and inclusivistic character of the Conclusions of Utrecht now constitute a barrier to the "coming-together" of other Reformed brethren (and churches) with

the Christian Reformed churches. What is the *nature* of the objection of these other Reformed brethren to the Conclusions of Utrecht? They assumedly hold other views regarding these matters. The crucial question is whether the nature of their divergent positions falls within the intent and purpose of the Conclusions, namely, that churches ought not to separate — nor remain separate — merely upon the basis of divergent, highly specialized differences concerning these matters. In short, *why* is such an inclusivistic instrument as the Conclusions of Utrecht today a barrier to unity with, and an instrument of exclusion of, Reformed brethren. I do not say that it is, but the reason *could be* of such nature that the Conclusions are the need of the hour. The authors of these overtures, I fear, can hope for little immediate success until this matter is explained and made plain to the Reformed brethren south of border.

By way of illustration — in a recent article in *De Watcher*, the Rev. A. De Jager urges the setting aside of the Conclusions of Utrecht. He then adds that the same question ought to be raised concerning the Three Points of 1924. In a purely formal sense, I quite sympathize with his suggestion. But whether my agreement could be more than merely formal depends on the *why*, *on the reason*, he thinks we ought also to consider setting aside the Three Points of 1924. I can think of very good reasons, but I can also think of very bad reasons for removing the official binding character of the decisions of 1924. The bad reasons would be acceptable to the Protestant Reformed objectors to 1924. The good reasons might, if recognized by both parties, lead to a recognition by both parties of the real issue and thus open the way for the Protestant Reformed churches (both sectors) to return to the Christian Reformed Church without changing their minds about common grace.

Although the Christian Reformed churches in the States ought to have considerable sympathy for these Canadian overtures, they ought to withhold their acceptance of them until they fully understand why the Conclusions of Utrecht which once held Reformed brethren together, now allegedly keep them apart.

The whole matter brought to the attention of Synod by these Canadian classes ought to receive our most careful consideration. The Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands — from whom we adopted these Conclusions — have recently set them aside and declared that they no longer — whether true or untrue — an official binding character. As the editor of *De Wachter* recently observed, we may well find ourselves the only church in the world which underwrites them. There is no objection to being unique, but one should have good reasons for it.

Concerning the Lord's Supper

by Jan Karel van Baalen

IT IS WELL KNOWN that the liturgy of our Church has come to us from the Netherlands. We are therefore heirs both to its Dutch virtues and imperfections. The former are many and precious, the latter admittedly few.

Nevertheless, imperfections are there, and this fact is borne out by the dissatisfaction that has been expressed again and again with our manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Several Synods have dealt with the matter, and now that we seem to be heading in the direction of a solution, this writer, safely tucked away in a far corner of the denomination with only "by reason of age . . . the honor and title of a minister," wishes to bring to the attention of all concerned a few thoughts that have ripened during a lifetime of ministry.

Not Central Enough

By the goodness of God, the writer of these lines has, since early boyhood, delighted in attending upon the services of worship of our churches, both in the Netherlands and in America. A communion service, however, was always a painful experience to "sit through," and it still is that to some extent. True, we in America have gotten beyond some of the more unpleasant features of a Dutch communion service, as we no longer hold that when we invite our neighbor to "have a cup of coffee with us" we must all drink from the same cup. There is no longer among us the pushing and crowding in the aisles that all in turn may have a seat around the same table. The unity, so we have come to understand, is in the contents, not in the container. So much is all to the good, and in so far we need not say with a recent writer in *Het Gereformeerde Weekblad*: "We have not as yet worked out an acceptable manner of administering the Lord's Supper."

We still are heirs, however, to the original idea that when the sacrament is to be administered, it is to be something that has to be *tagged on* to an already complete service of worship. This notion, and its subsequent action, has resulted in *two distinct evils*: lengthiness and needless repetition.

Lengthiness

In the first place, tagging-on tends to make the communion service needlessly and excessively lengthy.

While lengthiness is indeed the lesser of our two errors, it has given occasion to the most commonly voiced objection. Lengthy services are not popular in our restless age. And they interfere with the Sunday School hour. The latter is not too serious, and the former has been obviated to some extent by the fact that our ministers have learned to crowd so much into one service that the communion service takes little if any additional time when compared with our other worship services.

For all this, the solution is unsatisfactory because *too much is crowded* into one hour (or more), which makes for a hurried impression. Dr. Abraham Kuyper wrote correctly: "Nothing is more detrimental in sacred things than haste."

The observance of the sacrament is truly the most sacred part of our entire liturgy. Here haste and hurry are to be completely eliminated. But it remains difficult when we tag the sacrament on to the close of an already complete worship service as a sort of appendix to the sermon. This is beneath the dignity of the sacred sacrament. Here the Lord Himself takes over. Hand in glove with this there is a second objection to our method of observing the sacrament. It is this—that there is in our present method too much needless repetition.

Needless Repetition

What makes it painful to "sit through" a communion service is not its length, but the endless, exhausting repetitive element. Repetition is far more tiring than length of duration. The average communion service in our churches is patterned after the following schedule.

On the preceding Sunday we hear a "preparatory sermon," in which we are told that we are to test ourselves during the ensuing week in regard to our personal stand on "*misery, deliverance, gratitude*."

Having performed this duty (as it may be taken for granted) we come to church on the communion Sunday, and are regaled to: (1) the law and summary, (2) the song of confession, (3) the absolution, i.e., *misery, deliverance, and gratitude*. After this we hear another sermon which is virtually a second preparatory sermon, dealing with *misery, deliverance, gratitude*.

By this time it all sounds strangely familiar and needlessly repetitive, but the end is not yet. We are now made to submit to a *form* that takes fifteen minutes to read; and it deals with *misery, deliverance, gratitude*.

It is this endless repetition, rather than the "length" of our communion services, that makes it all so tiring and so needlessly dull.

Suggestions

1. On the Order of Worship

The present writer has succeeded over a period of years in evoking renewed interest in the communion service by following this order:

First, instead of the Ten Commandments plus the New Testament summary, begin only with the Summary, a penitential psalm and "assurance of pardon." This is to be followed by a very *brief* prayer, because the "long" prayer for this occasion comes with the Form.

Second, the Form for the Lord's Supper is now read, slowly and with emphasis. It is familiar and beautiful and we hear it before our attention has been dulled by other material.

After the words "May the almighty, merciful God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ help us in this through his Holy Spirit. Amen", the minister calls attention to some phrase in the Form that has just been read, selects an appropriate text that bears upon that particular aspect of the communion service, and gives a fifteen-minute sermonette. This is concluded with the words:

"That we may obtain all this, let us humble ourselves before God and with true faith implore Him for His grace."

We now have a true communion service, and not the "regular" service with the communion tagged on by way of appendix. This is truly a communion worship service with the sacrament in the chief and central position, where it belongs.

And this now leads me to a few suggestions as to the two "Proposed Revisions of the Form for the Lord's Supper" that are before our church since the Synod of 1957.

2. On the "Proposed Revisions"

(1) It will be unnecessary to split a Form that was evidently meant to be read at one time into two halves. The latter proposal is awkward, belittling, and detracts from the purpose of the Form. Thus *exit* Proposal Number II. The original Form is a unit, complete, and by no means too long for this solemn service of communion.

(2) We are now back to Number I, which, among other advantages, has kept intact as "optional" "the parenthetical material" of St. Paul's listing of sins that bar from access to the table of the Lord. All of these sins are, in one way or another, prevalent today; and we need today a heart-searching warning that a mere "good standing" in the church is not enough. So, then, let us leave the Form as much intact as possible, without "optional parenthetical material."

(3) Now follows a liturgical and historical blunder that occurs in both proposed Forms. In both of these the Creed is taken out of its original position and appended after the prayer. In Proposal I this is done with the following formulary: "That we may now indicate our readiness to receive this sacrament in true faith let us confess with heart and mouth the catholic, undoubted Christian faith." In Proposal II we read: "Let us now confess our Christian faith together in the words of the Apostles' Creed."

Here the first proposal has the edge on the second, because the first at any rate connects the Creed with the communion. In the second proposal it hangs in the air.

However, there seem to be two valid objections to this procedure, the first being that if the entire congregation, including minors who have not yet made a public confession of faith (before Consistory and congregation), are thus asked to "indicate readiness to receive this sacrament in true faith," we cannot immediately afterward exclude them from partaking of the bread and wine.

But the second objection is that this is historically incorrect. The Creed has always been a part of the prayer. The mistake of our fathers was that the Creed should have preceded the Lord's Prayer. The latter rounds out and completes the prayer, and is not to be followed by additional praying.

We do not need to make a confession of faith to indicate that we are going to confess our faith by partaking of the sacrament. But we do need the prayer that historically and liturgically was (but now in its proper order) as follows:

"Wilt Thou also graciously strengthen us by this holy Sacrament in the holy, catholic faith, of which we make confession with heart and mouth, saying: I believe in God the Father [etc.] . . . and all of this we pray in the Name of Him who taught us to say, Our Father Who art in heaven," etc.

(4) Finally. I studied at one time under a teacher of mathematics who, when utterly disappointed, would say: "The man who first invented this monstrosity should have a negative statue erected in his dishonor." May I suggest that the novelty of splitting up the eloquent formulary with which the tokens are distributed be abandoned. That formulary in its original and complete form is: "The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken unto a complete remission of all our sins." These words should remain intact. They should not be split up into a bit of information, followed after some ten minutes by a command out of a clear sky, "Take, eat!" The mechanical separation of what belongs together is liturgically hideous, and does not contribute in the least to what it is supposed to bring out, "the unity of eating and drinking together."

"This Is My Body . . ."

by Clarence Boersma

SINCE 1952 the Christian Reformed Synod has had before itself a request to scrutinize, and revise if necessary, Article XXXV of the Belgic Confession. The core of the problem raised concerns the statement in this Article dealing with the Holy Supper:

In the meantime we err not when we say that what is eaten and drunk by us is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ.

The matter has had the attention of one Study Committee after another, but Synod, though served with several Reports, has not yet discussed the problem. The latest action, by the Synod of 1959, resulted in the insertion of this sentence into the *Acts*: "Synod decides to postpone consideration of the Belgic Confession Revision until next year and refer the reports to the churches."

What the Confession Teaches

Upon reading the isolated statement quoted from a creed that we read only too rarely, but which we

nevertheless recognize as being an integral part of a precious spiritual heritage, the average loyal member of a Reformed church, almost by reflex, reacts defensively. Certainly, there must be an explanation! This cannot mean what it *seems* to say. What is the context? There must be some satisfactory *interpretation* of these words from a creedal bulwark that has stood for four hundred years!

It may be wise to go to the immediate context of the passage first. It is the fourth paragraph of the Article:

Now, as it is certain and beyond all doubt that Jesus Christ has not enjoined to us the use of His sacraments in vain, so He works in us all that He represents to us by these holy signs, though the manner surpasses our understanding and cannot be comprehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Spirit are hidden and incomprehensible. In the meantime we err not when we say that what is eaten and drunk by us is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ. But

the manner of our partaking of the same is not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith. Thus, then, though Christ always sits at the right hand of His Father in the heavens, yet does He not therefore cease to make us partakers of Himself by faith. This feast is a spiritual table, at which Christ communicates Himself with all His benefits to us, and gives us there to enjoy both Himself and the merits of His sufferings and death; nourishing, strengthening, and comforting our poor comfortless souls by the eating of His flesh, quickening and refreshing them by the drinking of His blood.

Our loyal church member already feels a bit more comfortable. Is not the extreme statement concerning which the question is raised surrounded by an abundance of words and phrases that modify and tone down the *seemingly* literal statement about eating Christ's natural body? Look! "The manner (of our participation in the Body of Christ) surpasses our understanding and cannot be comprehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Spirit are hidden and incomprehensible." Look again! "But the manner of our partaking of the same is not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith." And again! "Christ always sits at the right hand of His Father in the heavens." And finally: "This feast is a spiritual table." It has become increasingly clear by this time that some interpretation should be possible. Look! Is the Confession not using "sacramental language" in the statement under question?

The present writer is convinced that in the text of Article XXXV we find a remarkably clear, literal, unambiguous statement concerning the Presence of Christ in the holy elements which does not square with the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism, nor with the teaching of John Calvin. Indeed, there is extensive use of "sacramental language" in the Article. In the paragraph quoted, however, an attempt is obviously made at a frank and unambiguous *definition* of biblical, sacramental language used in the previous paragraphs, *viz.* "The communion of the body of Christ," "Jesus Christ who nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life of believers when they eat Him," "we . . . receive by faith—the true body and blood of Christ." The Confession declares simply that in some incomprehensible manner the believing communicant comes into contact with the physical body of Christ.

The following paraphrase may serve to state substantially the thrust of the paragraph.

Although we by no means understand the process by which a Christian partakes of the body and blood of Christ when he eats and drinks the sacramental bread and wine in faith—we are sure of this: he really partakes of Him. Nor are we heretical when we declare that it is Christ's own natural body which we eat. ("het eigen en natuurlijk lichaam en het eigen bloed van Christus"). It should be made clear, however, that "our partaking of the same [namely, 'the proper and natural body and

blood'] is not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith." By a means that transcends our understanding we receive Christ's natural body for the nourishment of our spiritual life, even "though Christ always sits at the right hand of the Father." Because we receive Christ's body "not by the mouth but by the spirit through faith," "this feast is a spiritual table." The benefits we derive from the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood are spiritual. It is our spiritual life that is refreshed and comforted thereby. Through the sacrament we become the beneficiaries of Christ's sacrificial suffering and death.

What the Catechism Teaches

A comparison of the Confession with the Heidelberg Catechism will serve to explain the reasonableness of those who have difficulties with Article XXXV. The Catechism (Lord's Day XXVIII and XXIX) says in effect: Christ is in heaven; we are on the earth. We have contact with Christ's true body only *indirectly*—by the Holy Spirit "who dwells both in Christ and in us." We might say, the third person of the Trinity is a *link* joining us to Christ who is in heaven. Through Him we become "partakers of his true body and blood."¹

The greatest difference between the Confession and the Catechism becomes evident at this point. In the Confession the function of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament is wholly ignored. Instead, we read that Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, "does not cease to make us partakers of Himself by faith." The believing communicant "in a manner that surpasses our understanding" achieves *direct* contact with the "proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ." This is made doubly clear in the previous paragraph of the Confession where we confess that we "receive by faith . . . the true body and blood of Christ in our souls." If we substitute the definition of "true body," which the Confession next proceeds to make, we may legitimately read this thus: "we receive by faith . . . the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ into our souls." The souls of the faithful are *present* at the table of the Lord and incomprehensibly the "natural body of Christ" enters in, *i.e.*, becomes *present*, here and now. This is the inescapable teaching of the Confession regarding the meaning of the words: "*hoc est corpus*." This is its answer to the most prominent and knottiest theological question of Reformation times.

One might object that it is not altogether correct that the Holy Spirit is ignored in the Article. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is mentioned once. But how? ". . . the manner surpasses our understanding and cannot be comprehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Spirit are hidden and incomprehensible."

1. See also Lord's Day XX, where the nature and function of the Holy Spirit is taught: "He is also given me, to make me by a true faith partaker of Christ and all His benefits."

This is a mere comparison, and any *reading into* it is plainly illegitimate. Indeed, not even this mention of the Holy Spirit is found in the Dutch edition of 1562! The Confession could as well have said: "It cannot be comprehended by us, just as the vital processes of life are hidden and incomprehensible."²

Calvin on the "Presence"

That the Confession here teaches a doctrine that is foreign to that of John Calvin should be clear to anyone who has read Book IV of the *Institutes*. The Confession maintains that we "receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of the soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls"—i.e., the "proper and natural" body and blood. Calvin, however, says the direct opposite. He says,

I candidly confess, that I reject that mixture of the flesh of Christ with our souls, or that transfusion of it into us, which they teach; because it is sufficient for us that Christ inspires life into our souls from the substance of His flesh, and even infuses His own life into us, though His flesh never actually enters into us (*Inst.*, IV, XVII, 32).

Calvin makes repeated reference to the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about genuine communion with the body of Christ. Let this serve as a sample:

For, as we have not the least doubt that Christ's body is finite, according to the invariable condition of a human body, and is contained in heaven, where it was once received, till it shall return to judgement, so we esteem it utterly unlawful to bring it back under these corruptible elements, or to imagine it to be present everywhere.

2. Dr. A. D. R. Polman, author of a four volume work: *Onze Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis* (Franeker, 195?, Vol. IV, p. 241) fails in his attempt to have the Confession agree at this point with John Calvin (and the Catechism). I translate him: "Our Confession in any case declares that this mystical union is initially brought about *by means of the hidden and incomprehensible operation of the Holy Spirit*. [The italics are Polman's] Here again, this is definite, decisive, as in the whole doctrine of the Sacraments. All others obscure the operation of the Holy Spirit. He overcomes spatial distance and forms the link in the Holy Supper and elsewhere between Christ and His People We are fed by Christ's own body and blood, while nevertheless, any idea of a substantial Presence is out of the question. The Spirit alone causes us to receive life from Christ's life-giving body." Dr. Polman first misquotes the Confession "door de Heilige Geest" (by means of the Holy Spirit) when he should have quoted "gelijk de werking des Heiligen Geestes verborgen en onbegrijpelijk is." (as the operations of the Holy Spirit are hidden and incomprehensible.) And upon this misquotation Dr. Polman builds up a theory concerning the manner of our partaking of Christ that accords perfectly with the views of John Calvin and the teachings of the Catechism—but which is quite apocryphal as far as the Confession is concerned. The Confession says that *Christ* gives Himself to us and that we receive the "proper and natural body" in our souls but Dr. Polman comes to the opposite conclusion: "Wij worden met Christus eigen lichaam en bloed gevoed, terwijl toch elke substantiële presentie verre blijft," (We are nourished by Christ's own body and blood, while nevertheless any idea of a substantial Presence is out of the question).

Nor is there any need of this, in order to our enjoying the participation of it; since the Lord by his Spirit gives us the privilege of being united with himself in body, soul, and spirit. The bond of this union, therefore, is the Spirit of Christ, by whom we are conjoined, and who is, as it were, the channel by which all that Christ himself is and has is conveyed to us.

But someone may come with a rejoinder that quotations from Calvin may be made that come very close to saying the same as the Confession. One might quote from Calvin's dispute with Westphal:

As if forsooth we conjured up a phantom instead of a body! We, on the contrary, when we know that there was but one sole body of Christ which was offered up as a victim to reconcile us with God, assert at the same time that that very body is offered to us in the Lord's Supper, because, in order that Christ might communicate to us the grace of salvation which he has procured, it behooves that body first to be appropriated by us and the flesh of Christ to be made vivifying to us, since from it we draw spiritual life. (Quoted by A. Mitchell Hunter: *The Teachings of John Calvin*, Fleming H. Revell Co., Second Edition, 1950, pp. 184f.)

This is Calvin at his polemical best refuting Westphal's charge that he neglected to "discern the true body." Calvin here is straining to make it clear that the sacrament is a genuine Means of Grace and that he is just as sure of a real participation in the body of Christ as are those who hold to Lutheran or Roman Catholic views. Just how "that very body is offered to us in the Lord's Supper" and how "the flesh of Christ is made vivifying to us" he explains elsewhere. What the believing communicant really receives, Calvin says, is the *substance* of Christ's body.

We say that the substance of Christ's flesh and blood is our spiritual life, and that it is communicated to us under the symbols of bread and wine, for Christ, in instituting the Supper, promises nothing falsely, nor mocks us with vain show, but represents by external signs what he has really given us" (*Corpus Reformatorum* 20:73. Quoted by Ronald S. Wallace: *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1957, pp. 201f.).

That Calvin means by "substance" something quite non-material and quite other than "the proper and natural body" is clear from his own definition of the word in his "Dispute Concerning the Word 'Substance'":

To remove this dispute, we must remove the gross imagination as to the eating of the flesh as if it were similar to corporeal food The explanation to be adopted will thus be, that substantially we become partakers of the flesh of Christ—not that any carnal mixture takes place, or that the flesh of Christ brought down from Heaven penetrates into us, or is swallowed by the mouth, but because the flesh of Christ, in respect of its *power and efficacy*, vivifies our souls in the same way that bread and wine nourish our bodies (*Tracts*, II, p. 577).

Thus the "substance" of Christ's body in which the communicant participates is equated with "its power and efficacy." This is borne out, too, by the following quotation adduced by Mitchell Hunter (*op. cit.*, p. 185):

The flesh itself is of no value to us since it received its origin from earth and was subjected to death His flesh is in no sense projected into us (*caro ejus nequaquam in nos trajicitur*) that we may live thereby, but he poureth into us by the secret power of His Spirit His force and strength (*vim*).

Calvin on John 6

The Confession is also utterly out of harmony with Calvin's teachings when it quotes and paraphrases at considerable length the discourse of Jesus on the "Bread of Life" in John 6, while quite ignoring our Master's specific institution of the Holy Supper "in the night in which he was betrayed." Most of Article XXXV resounds with phrases reminiscent of John 6:

But for the support of the spiritual heavenly life which believers have, he has sent a living bread which descended from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, who nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life of believers when they eat Him.

. . . nourishing, strengthening, and comforting our poor comfortless souls by the eating of His flesh.

Indeed, the first allusion to the suffering and death of Christ comes without any emphasis whatever when one has finished two thirds of the Article! After this there is one, and only one, more reference to our Lord's Passion. This one could be interpreted to be a veiled reminder of Christ's institution of the Holy Supper.

Lastly, [sic!] we receive this holy sacrament in the assembly of God, with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior.³

3. Compare this to the Catechism, which speaks only of eating the *crucified* body and drinking the *shed* blood of Christ.

It should be plain from the reading of John 6 that Jesus is not discoursing on the subject of the sacrament. After his feeding of the five thousand he exhorts his followers to seek the food "which abideth unto eternal life" rather than the "the food which perisheth." In verse 47 Jesus says: "He that believeth hath eternal life." In verse 51 He says: "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever." "Believing" and "eating of this bread" are one and the same thing: the means for attaining eternal life. There is no suggestion of any connection between this discourse and the words of Jesus: "This is my body which is broken for you". Nor is the "eating" in John 6 the same as is meant in St. Paul's words: "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come." However, even if one should interpret John 6 as containing some faint adumbration of Sacrifice and of Sacrament, is this sufficient to warrant including such an interpretation in our church dogma? John Calvin certainly did not think so.

For we never rightly and advantageously feed on Christ, except as crucified, and when we have a lively apprehension of the efficacy of his death. And, indeed, when Christ called himself "the bread of life", in this concern he did not use that appellation on account of the sacrament, as some persons *erroneously imagine*, but because he had been given to us as such by the Father, and showed himself to be such, when, becoming a partaker of our human mortality, he made us partakers of his Divine immortality; . . . (*Inst.*, IV, XVII, 4).

Ecclesia reformata ecclesia reformanda est! Whether or not there is sufficient cause for creedal revision at the point stressed here will have to be decided by Synod. It is hoped that this essay will stimulate thought on the subject and thus contribute to a well-considered decision. The Synod of 1959 decided to "refer the report [on Revision] to the churches." These reflections are being offered as an implementation of those reports.

WHICH SET OF PRINCIPLES?

SIRS:

The Christian Reformed denomination at present is cooperating in the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN) only to the extent of loaning to the school Dr. Harry R. Boer, who is the Principal of TCNN and is also a teacher there.

TCNN was set up because there was a "felt need" in the Church of Nigeria for leaders, evangelists, etc. who had

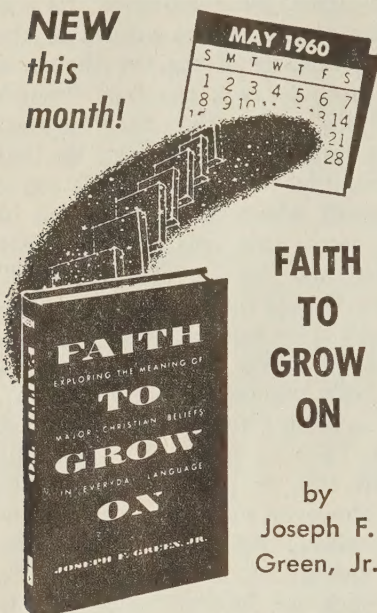
a training at least as thorough as those Nigerians who are working in post offices, telephone exchanges, business offices, and government posts. This "felt need" spurred several Christian missions into uniting to set up a united theological school for the training of national Christian leaders for the Christian Church in Nigeria.

The entire General Mission Conference of the Christian Reformed Church

in Nigeria, with very few exceptions, was in favor of our denominational participation in TCNN. Synod of 1959 decided for limited participation in the school. A good deal of vagueness seems to exist, however, in many minds as to what our denomination has committed itself to. Have we committed ourselves to *participation* in TCNN? Some seem to think we have. Others find no such commitment.

The term Synod adopted was, clearly, *participate*. Are we compromising our denominational stand by *participation*

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in TCNN? Or, would we be guilty of violating some plain truths of God's Word by not participating in TCNN?

When it is said that we compromise our Calvinism or our Reformed witness by cooperating with "Arminians" in TCNN, it would seem that the critic has in mind the "five points of Calvinism" or the "Five Articles Against the Remonstrants." Parts of the ordination vows come into focus in connection with these "five points." But while we fear that we will compromise this stand by cooperating with "Arminians," could it be that we are guilty of violating the clearly revealed will of God by *not* cooperating more fully with the other Christian missions of Nigeria in TCNN?

Many times it has been confessed that the other men teaching in TCNN are Christians. It has been said that they are *for* Christ and *not against* Him. Equally often it has been said that some of these Christians are Arminians.

We can be too selective and partial in the principles we choose to use for denominational participation or non-participation. Louis Fischer, in his book *Indonesia*, writes that after World War II, the Dutch had every intention of again taking governmental control of Indonesia. But the National government, which had arisen between the defeat of the Japanese and the return of the Dutch, had no thought of returning to a colonial status. So a UN good

offices committee was sent in to arbitrate. To this committee the Dutch presented a *set of principles*, in which nothing was said of the right of self-government by the Indonesians. The National government of Indonesia also presented a *set of principles*. One of their principles was the *right to freedom from colonial imperialism*.

The point is, both sides had *sets of principles* from which each made a very logical case and drew valid conclusions. If denominationally we do the same, we can come up with a set of principles from which we draw the valid conclusion that we would be compromising the truth of God if we cooperated in TCNN. But let only a few truths from God's Word be considered as to whether we are employing too limited a set of principles if we conclude that we are compromising our stand by cooperating in TCNN.

We admit publicly that the mission groups participating in TCNN and the missionaries teaching at TCNN are Christians, even if "Arminian" Christians. By that admission we say that they, with us, *belong to Christ* and are of the "one holy catholic church, the communion of saints." Christ prayed for the oneness of His disciples, His Church. That oneness is to be reflected in the Church's spirit, form, and doctrine. That oneness is to be real *while* the Church is in process of sanctification by the "truth, thy word is truth." That oneness is not to wait *until* we are perfectly sanctified.

There can be no dispute about the Biblical teaching of the unity of all Christians. It is the will of God. Now unless we are prepared to say that Arminians cannot be Christians, then let us consider that we are called to accept this unity as principal for judging united Christian endeavor in TCNN. Is the Spirit's rebuke to the divided church of Corinth (I Corinthians 1) no more to be "profitable . . . for correction" (II Timothy 3:16) of our divisive spirit?

In the matter of the unity of the Church in Nigeria, we must consider whether we are calling upon the national church there to violate this prayerful petition of our Lord for oneness in His Church by our hesitant and limited participation in TCNN.

The will of God as expressed in I Corinthians 11:25 is that the members of the Body of Christ should have a care for one another. This is not only

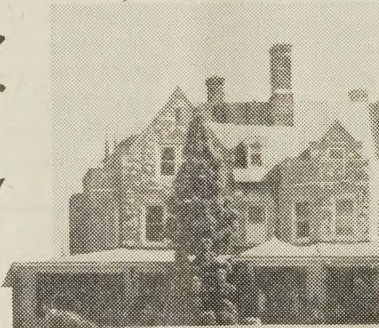
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DO YOU regard the present interest in "the last things" as significant?

Ned B. Stonehouse, Dean of the Faculty, replies: Yes, certainly. But then eschatology must not be viewed as merely symbolic or mythical, and so emptied of its meaning. Perceived with Biblical force and realism, it brings to focus nothing less than the consummation of the purposes of God in Christ.

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to be congregationally or denominationally construed and applied. We should have a care also for Arminian Christians who are members of the Body of Christ. It is a Christian duty to help Arminian Christians who are *inferior* Christians. It is our Christian obligation as a denomination to help the *less-gifted* Arminian Christian brethren in TCNN, and the less-gifted churches from which the Arminian Christians come for preparation in TCNN, and the Arminian Christian churches to which the graduates will return to minister the Word of life.

We have the Christian duty to help the young church in Nigeria; to help the Arminian Christians in TCNN, and the students who come there, to a fuller view of "the whole counsel of God." At present we have only loaned one zealous helper of their faith. Ought we to stop there or are we not obliged to help more fully that *CHRISTIAN theological seminary* in that pagan land.

The unity of the Christian Church is grounded in love and humility. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." The spirit spoke of love to a church divided into parties. (I Corinthians 1 and 13). To this same church, the Holy Spirit spoke of true wisdom to re-

place the wisdom of this world. To this same church, the Spirit spoke of great Christian leaders knowing only in part (I Corinthians 13:9).

In all our discussion of TCNN have we really believed that "we know in part, and we prophesy in part?" (I Corinthians 13:9). In all of our ecclesiastical decisions, congregational or classical or synodical, have we made them with the "whole counsel of God" immediately before our mind's eye?

Love and humility obliges us to help those whose understanding of "the whole counsel of God" is inferior to our own. It would be becoming to us as "Calvinistic" Christians, who with Paul "know in part, and prophesy in part," to develop TCNN and thus help the young church in Nigeria before it drops out of sight behind the Moslem curtain, or an intensely nationalistic African curtain.

Is our denominational cooperation in TCNN to be a compromise? The answer depends upon whether we are partial in the set of Christian principles which we apply. If we select a certain set of principles and draw a conclusion from that set of principles, then we may conclude we are compromising indeed by cooperating in TCNN. But, then a further question must be asked

Will stinted cooperation in TCNN not be a *violation* of some well-known truths of God's Word concerning the unity of the Church of Christ? Concerning the help we are *obliged* to give the other, weaker members of the Body of Christ? and concerning the love and humility we *ought* to display in our ecclesiastical decisions?!

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CALVIN AND INFALLIBILITY: A NOTE

SIRS:

There has been much discussion among us recently regarding the meaning of infallibility. It might be of interest, therefore, to restate briefly some of the conclusions of an earlier article which touched on the topic ("Genesis and Science in John Calvin," *Reformed Journal*, March, 1956), and add a few more citations. It would seem that Calvin's views on the subject are highly relevant to the present discussion.

It is unnecessary to belabor the well-known fact that Calvin was a staunch defender of evangelical Christianity, one who placed the highest value on the Bible as the Word of God.

Calvin did not, however, immediately jump to the conclusion that therefore we must consider the Bible as a compendium of accurate observations in science. The Bible, in his view, speaks

to the common man, and presents the undeveloped science of that day. But this does not mean that the Holy Spirit is in error.

But how can this be? If the Bible gives the undeveloped science of that day, does not this involve the Holy Spirit in error? For does not the Holy Spirit inspire the writers of the Bible?

Calvin's answer to this apparent dilemma is that it is a false dilemma. The Holy Spirit does not err; the Holy Spirit is well aware of the true facts of the matter; but the Holy Spirit *accommodates* Himself to the simple people with whom He is dealing. His purpose is to *communicate* religious truth, and this means *accommodation* to the limited and partial understanding of men. Thus, if it turns out that a given passage in the Bible is not correct scientifically, this does *not* mean that the Holy Spirit is in error: rather, that He has *accommodated* Himself to the

(continued on page 24)

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incomplete scientific knowledge of that day.

* * *

It remains to give a few citations from Calvin, to illustrate what he means by accommodation. Many, a great many, examples could be given. Here are a few.

Calvin says (Jer. 10:1), regarding the question of how a Christian can oppose astrology, since the Bible calls the stars "signs": "The prophet does not use the word 'signs' in its proper meaning; for he refers not here to its true origin, but *accommodates himself to the notions which then prevailed.*" And (Jer. 31:35), "The prophets spoke popularly and according to the common notions. Had they philosophized as astronomers do, and spoken of the monthly course of the moon and the annual course of the sun, *they could not have been understood by the common people.*" And (Ps. 148:3), "We know that Moses and the prophets ordinarily spoke in a popular style, suited to the lowest apprehension. *It would be absurd then to seek to reduce what they say to the rules of science.*" And (Ps. 114:3), "It is in a poetical strain that the Psalmist describes . . . The description however *does not fit the facts of the case.*" And (Ps. 19:4), "He [David] *does not here discourse scientifically . . . but, accommodating himself to the rudest and dullest, confines himself to the ordinary appearances presented to the eye.*" And (Ps. 136:7), "The Holy Spirit had no in-

* The citations are to Calvin's *Commentaries*, or rather, to the passage which he comments on. I have replaced "philosopher" with "scientist," since the 1847 translation *means* scientist, and uses "philosopher" in the older sense as including the "natural philosopher" or scientist. The underlining is my own.

tention to teach astronomy . . . [It] would rather speak childishly than unintelligibly to the humble and unlearned."

Calvin takes up the "difficulty" of the firmament and the waters above it (Gen. 1:7); he does *not* say that to deny that it actually exists is destroying our faith in the Word, or anything of the sort. "It appears opposed to common sense, and quite incredible, that there should be waters above the heavens . . . [but] nothing is here treated but the visible form of the world. *He who would learn astronomy and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere.*" Again, on the "difficulty" (Gen. 1:15) that the moon actually shines merely by reflected light: "*It is not here scientifically discussed* how great the sun is . . ." Or again, on Genesis 1:13-16: "If the astronomer inquires regarding the *actual* dimensions of the stars, he will find the moon to be *less* than Saturn; but this is somewhat abstruse, for to the common sight it appears differently. Moses therefore *adapts his discourse to common usage.*" And again — to cite one more of the many, many passages that could be cited — he says (*Comm. on Gen.*, p. 256): "Certainly, in the first chapter [of Genesis], he [Moses] *did not treat*

scientifically of the stars, as a scientist would do." Rather, "he called them, in a popular manner, *according to their appearance to the uneducated rather than according to truth*, two great lights."

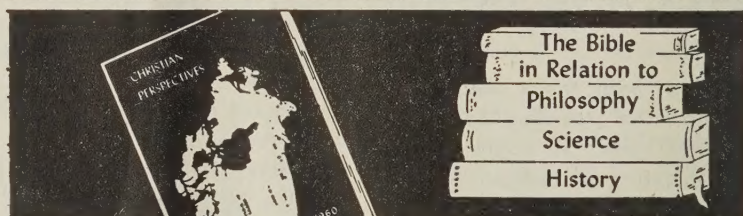
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Calvin also says (and such quotations could be multiplied!) that it is an "undeniable truth, that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture . . . for though it conciliate our reverence by its internal majesty, it never seriously affects till it is confirmed by the Spirit in our own heart. Therefore, being illuminated by Him, we now believe the divine original of the Scripture . . ." (*Inst.* 1:7:5).

* * *

Dare we make a suggestion? Could it be that if we followed Calvin, the "controversy" on infallibility would disappear? Could it be that both sides might agree with Calvin? Perhaps the coming Synod, meeting at Calvin College, might ask its already existing Committee on infallibility to investigate the possibility that Calvin's views on this matter are acceptable.

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